

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, January 29, 1901

Volta Bureau, January 29, 1901. Dear Mabel: —

Among the thousands of letters coming to the Census Office for me are many from people who have become deaf in adult life, and who write to know whether I cannot “bring a ray of light to a darkened life”. It has occurred to me that your paper on speech reading is just the thing to send them. I find from Mr. Hitz that many enquiries are made for it and that it will now be necessary in order to supply the demand that a special edition be issued by the Volta Bureau. I have asked him to make the edition large enough to enable me to supply copies to deaf persons who write personal letters to me through the Census Office.

I have just been reading the article and I must say that it strikes me as an admirable paper — original — well expressed — and containing many thoughtful suggestions of great value to teachers as well as to deaf persons themselves. As MM. Dupont et Legrand say in their French translation “L'article si remarquable et si remarque de Mme. Graham Bell, sur la “ Lecture sur les levres a deja fait le tour du monde.” It has been translated into French Italian, German and into one of the Scandinavian languages to my knowledge, and has also, I believe appeared in Russian and Dutch.

2

MM. Dupont et Legrand say (of course in French) “We give here a complete and faithful translation of it in the hope that it may prove useful to all those who are interested in this important question of reading upon the lips. We cannot give too much publicity to such a masterpiece; Mrs. Graham Bell's paper is in effect one of the finest and certainly the most original which has been written upon this subject”. (Nous en donnond ici une version complete et fidele, dans l'espoir d'etre utile a tous ceux qu'interesse cette importante question de la lecture sur les levres. On ne saurait donner trop de publicite a de pareils

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chefs-d'oeuvres; l'etude de Mme. Graham Bell est, en effet, une des plus belles et, certainement, la plus originale qui ait été écrite sur ce sujet.”)

Now we are going to get up this paper in fine style for the Bureau with an introduction by Mr. Hitz giving references to the foreign translations of it, and I want you to write a special preface for this edition putting in anything you may desire to say upon the subject. In order that you may refresh your recollection of the paper I send you a copy as it has been sent out from the Volta Bureau. This turns out to be a section of the proceedings of the Fourth Summer Meeting of the A.A.P. T. A S .D. containing your paper and three other papers upon the same subject. Your paper is certainly deserving of being published by itself, and we shall get it up in fine style so that you need not be ashamed of it. This paper and your pamphlet on “The story of the Rise of the Oral Method in America as told in the writings of the Hon. Gardiner Greene Hubbard” — your unpublished paper on the telephone — and your paper for the Baddeck Ladies Club on the Paris Exposition, show that you are a very remarkable writer and I am proud of you. [??][??][??][??][??][??][??][??] — G + ([??][??][??][??])

By the by, where is that paper on the telephone? Your father was very anxious that it should be published — and so am I. I think you were disheartened because I made some criticisms concerning the language. The matter and manner were admirable, and my criticism, if I remember rightly, related entirely to minor points. I shall read through your paper on the Paris Exhibition again to see whether it would be suitable for publication. If I think so, have I your permission to have it published?

I have just been scolding Miss Safford for leaving a box of fine and expensive cigars WHERE I CAN GET AT IT, so now I am going to ask her to keep the box at her own house — and pension me every day!

The time is at hand when I must make a report to the Director of the Census — or rather to Dr. Wines — on the arrangement of the census details relating to the Blind and the

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Deaf 4 upon a card punched by the Census Clerks, so that the returns may be electrically tabulated by the Hollerith machine employed in the Census Office. I have made quite a number of arrangements — none of which are quite satisfactory to myself, because I find that I cannot decide upon the arrangement of details until I know the nature of the tables that are to be prepared. What we want is — to punch upon the cards — the details required for the tables. So, for some time past I have stopped work upon the cards and have been trying to frame blank forms of tables. But here again a difficulty appears. I cannot decide upon the forms of the tables until I have — clearly defined in my own mind — the objects of the whole investigation.

What is the Census for (of the Blind and the Deaf). What useful objects are to be attained — and what is the nature of the report to be made.

It seems to me that I must study the whole subject UPSIDE DOWN. The thing that is wanted last I must consider first and that which is needed almost immediately should be last in my thoughts. There is very little time for me to consider the whole matter. The Census Office will soon reach the point when cards must be prepared and punched. I have thought a great deal over the subject, but do not feel myself yet in a condition to report definitely to Dr. Wines. How am I to place myself in such a condition?

5

It seems to me that the best way to reach the end in view will be to talk the whole matter over with you . In this way I may kill two birds with one stone. I can let you know what I am doing and what I am thinking about, and on the other hand I can clarify my idears prparitory to making a report to Dr. Wines. I propose, therefore, to write a special letter to you upon the subject — to make a sort of embryonic report to you. Miss Safford can make a carbon copy for me, which I can work over — correct — and expand into a report to Dr. Wines. It will give me a basis for revision and amplification. B

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I sent you copies yesterday of various communications relating to the proposed Bureau of Research in the Government Departments, and will let you know from time to time how matters progress. Mr. True of the Agricultural Department has taken hold at once; and — this morning — a meeting was held at the Agricultural Department of the members of the Committee representing the Agricultural colleges of the U. S. established under grants of lands from the Federal Government. This Committee is desirous of conferring with me and I am to meet them at five o'clock at the Cosmos Club. I also have an engagement to dine with Dr. Wines at six o'clock, so that I cannot write further today. It is nearly four o'clock and I better go and get dressed.

Your loving husband Alec.